

LEARNING AND LIFELONG LEARNING IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS: A POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Student learning and learning to learn, or lifelong learning, are important educational issues. Accrediting bodies, such as the AACSB, have considered lifelong learning to be a part of the "total education experience" (AACSB, 2010) for higher education. As marketing educators, ensuring that students acquire the skills necessary to learn and become lifelong learners is one of our most critical educational endeavors. However, it appears that these issues have not been explored in the marketing domain. To address this issue, a number of questions seem pertinent. What is learning in professional schools such as business? What is required to develop lifelong learners? How is learning and lifelong learning associated with marketing education? The purpose of this paper is to explore the meaning of learning and lifelong learning in business schools and to suggest a curriculum students need in order to develop into lifelong learners.

Learning is the "acquisition of knowledge or skill which occurs in, and may lead to changes in, the brain" (Biological, 2005). It has also been defined as "a multidimensional process that results in a relatively enduring change in a person or persons, and consequently how that person or persons will perceive the world and reciprocally respond to its affordances physically, psychologically, and socially" (Alexander, Schallert & Reynolds, 2009). According to Merriam and Caffarella (1998) there are three orientations to learning: 1) the behaviorist orientation, 2) the cognitive orientation, and 3) the humanistic orientation to learning. The cognitive orientation views learning as an internal process, including insight, information processing, memory, perception, and synthesis and seems applicable to education in business schools because such education is formalized learning.

If learning in business schools is primarily a cognitive process, then learning means knowing,

understanding, and application. Knowing is the first step in learning and requires students to have knowledge regarding concepts and facts deemed essential by professionals in the field. Students should become familiar with important concepts in the domain of marketing and a curriculum needs to be developed that emphasizes those concepts. However, faculty must first agree on what the domain of marketing should be. Understanding, the second aspect of learning requires students to understand analytical frameworks, theories, models and processes involving relationships between concepts. At this stage concepts are specified and integrated, not only with other concepts, but with the real world of business. The third aspect of learning, application, requires students to apply knowledge using integrated and analytical frameworks. Application stresses logic and critical thinking which means using the problem-solving process and the scientific method in different settings and situations. If, as marketing professors, we can assist students in acquiring knowledge, understanding, and the application of marketing concepts, the next task is to develop lifelong learners.

Lifelong learning is an important concept even though there is no succinct definition of exactly what lifelong learning is (Mocker & Spear, 1982; Sharples, 2000). Across various definitions the central theme is that through some form of formal education, the individual acquires the knowledge, understanding, and analytical tools to begin the process of self-education. As educators we can assist students in becoming lifelong learners by developing a marketing curriculum that teaches the tools and basic foundations of learning, the scientific method, statistics, reading and writing, as well as the content of the discipline.

References available on request